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ROSA'S LAW WILL HAVE PROFOUND IMPACT

September 29, 2010 by cpehrson

Rosa's Law is on its way to President Obama's desk for his signature. After passing last month in the Senate and last week in the House by unanimous consent, the law to eliminate the terms "mental retardation" from federal education, health and labor laws will soon be put into effect.

U.S. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.), who introduced the bill to the Senate, states that "This law is about families fighting for the respect and dignity of their loved ones. This change will have a positive effect on more than 6 million Americans."

For Rosa Marcellino's family in Edgewater, Maryland, the passing of this law is a celebration they won't soon forget. Last year, when Rosa's mother learned that Rosa, who has Down syndrome, had been labeled retarded at school, she teamed up with other parents to introduce a bill to change the terminology in Maryland state laws. Rosa's brother, Nick, testified at the hearing before the General Assembly, saying "What you call people is how you treat them. What you call my sister is how you will treat her. If you believe she's 'retarded,' it invites taunting, stigma. It invites bullying and it also invites the slammed doors of being treated with respect and dignity."

Rosa's Law will replace the phrase "mentally retarded" with "an individual with an intellectual disability" in health, education and labor law. It makes the language in federal law consistent with that used by the Centers for Disease Control, the health arm of the United Nations, and the White House through the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

"I'm pleased that the House has approved Rosa's Law, and hope the President will sign it quickly," Senator Mike Enzi (R-Wy.), a co-sponsor of the bill, said. "This bill is simple in nature but profound in what it will do when it is enacted. For far too long we have used hurtful words like 'mental retardation' or 'MR' in our federal statutes to refer to those living with intellectual disabilities. While the way people feel is important, the way people are treated is equally important. Rosa's Law will make a greatly-needed change that should have been made well before today – and it will encourage us to treat people the way they would like to be treated."

We applaud the Senate and the House for recognizing and respecting the dignity of people with intellectual disabilities. We applaud the Marcellino family for supporting Rosa and taking action on something that will affect people positively for many years to come.

NOTE: President Obama signed Rosa's Law legislation on October 5, 2010.